

Black Water Lilies

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Black Water Lilies

by [Frondere](#)

Summary

“Don’t jerk off too hard thinkin’ about yourself, Sixer. You might break a hip.”

Low-hanging fruit, sure, but a guaranteed reaction. Normally, Ford would’ve fired back with something sharp about Stan being immature, or at least rolled his eyes.

Instead, Ford froze mid-step, his face twitching with something that wasn’t quite embarrassment but wasn’t anger either. He stammered, eyes flicking everywhere but at Stan. Then, without a word, he disappeared into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

Stan stood there, scratching his head. “Huh,” he muttered to himself. “That’s new.”

Notes

I’ve done too much research about sirens, and wanted to figure out the best possible way to make this as similar as possible to western stories and theories about ‘mermaids’ – and that resulted in a spiral of Wikipedia research. And fake scheduling an eco-lodge trip. And, sour gummy fish. Lots of sour gummy fish. For Sixerstanley, [based on this](#), which was one of our first interactions with each other! I love them so much you don't understand I will crawl to the edge of the earth for them. [also, don't come at me for lore accuracy or geography PLEASE IM BEGGING]

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Stan hadn't been particularly sure what to expect when he and Ford decided to set sail together. It wasn't that he didn't welcome the adventure—hell, it was everything they'd dreamed of as kids. The open ocean, salt in the air, and nothing but the horizon to chase. But now, it wasn't just a childhood fantasy. They'd survived thirty-plus years apart, rescued Ford from that damned portal, saved the world from Weirdmageddon, and somehow come out the other side with a family that actually gave a damn about them. Stan had a niece and nephew who loved him for who he was, and for the first time in forever, he was genuinely content with life.

L'Chaim, as the kids say.

He'd never felt more alive than he did now, out at sea on their ridiculously sleek sailing catamaran. It was an absurdly nice boat for a couple of old guys like them, but hey, when you save the world, you *deserve* to splurge. Their current journey was a big one—crossing the Atlantic to South Africa, with pit stops along the Caribbean and South America.

They'd docked in Georgetown, Guyana, and Ford had somehow convinced him to venture inland on some half-baked plan to reach the Rupununi region. Stan didn't fight it; what was he going to do, say *no*? It wasn't like he had any better ideas, and besides, Mabel had made him promise to snap pictures of strange creatures at every stop. South America was bound to have plenty of weird critters to keep her scrapbook dreams alive.

Currently, though, Stan was flicking off a creepy little moth that tried to kamikaze straight into his throat. He gagged and grumbled, "Ugh, gross," before swatting at another bug that had made its way onto his arm. "Hey, Sixer," he called out, trying to get Ford's attention.

Ford was hunched over his notebook, jotting something down in his careful scrawl, mumbling in a tone both fascinated and frustrated.

"It's maddening," Ford muttered, brows furrowed in intense focus. "Traditional Cariban cosmology has become all but impossible to recover. Thanks to Christian missionaries, everything's muddled. Trying to get oral accounts is like—"

“Stanford,” Stan called again, louder this time, but Ford kept speaking.

“...even in the Pomeroon District, I can barely find anyone who remembers Amalivaca *by name*. It’s like the stories are erased, or at least hidden...” Ford’s voice trailed off as he scribbled down more notes, frustration evident in every stroke of his pen.

"Sixer!" Stan practically shouted, drawing a startled jerk from Ford, who looked up with his glasses knocked slightly askew.

Ford’s eyes sharpened with awareness, and he muttered an apology. “Ah—what is it, Stanley?”

Stan snorted, reaching out to fix Ford’s glasses. “I was just asking if you’re trying to get us lost or if there’s some master plan here?”

Ford huffed. "I'm not getting us lost. Our guide gave very precise directions to the boat that would take us to Rewa Village. There’s an eco-lodge community with views down to the Rupununi River. So *yes*, I do, in fact, know where we’re going.”

Stan groaned theatrically, loosening the collar of his shirt. “Just get me there; I’m sweatin’ in places that ain’t polite to mention.”

“Please, spare me the details.”

Stan raised an eyebrow, smirking as he leaned in. “Wanna whiff? Real earthy, you know?”

Ford’s eyes widened, and he barked out a horrified, “Absolutely *not* !” He quickened his pace, his back rigid as he strode ahead. Stan’s laughter echoed through the trees, carrying far into the jungle, and Ford muttered something about childish antics, but Stan saw the smile he was trying to hide.

It'd taken the better part of a day to finally reach this place—this “eco-lodge” Ford had gone on and on about. Between the endless buzzing bugs, the sticky, oppressive heat, and the rickety boat that had somehow made the last stretch of the journey without tipping them overboard, Stan was already questioning his life choices. But when they finally stepped off and took in the view, he had to admit it wasn't *all* bad. Their cabin sat nestled among the trees, the water lapping close by, with a little hammock hanging off to the side. The cabin itself was small and rustic, with a round, open layout like an old benab, just with the added perk of mosquito screens.

“Finally,” Stan muttered, dropping his bag with a thud onto the wooden floor. Without wasting another second, he made a beeline for the hammock. He flopped into it, sighing deeply as he stretched out, letting the gentle sway ease the tension in his aching back. “Maybe dragging me out to the middle of nowhere *for who knows what* isn't the worst idea,” he called over to Ford.

Ford let his bag drop next to Stan's, giving him that look. “You're *conveniently* deaf whenever I do explain things, aren't you?” he said dryly, leaning over Stan with his hands on his hips. “*Not* that it's anything new.”

Stan waved a hand dismissively. “You know I can barely keep up when you're speaking plain English, let alone when you start rambling about ancient myths and ghost stories.”

Ford's expression didn't change as he leaned in and gave the hammock a light push, just enough to make it wobble. Stan flailed briefly, shooting Ford a sharp glare. “Careful,” Ford said with mock innocence. “Wouldn't want you to fall.”

Stan narrowed his eyes. “One day, I'm gonna throw you overboard, and I *won't* even feel bad.”

Ford straightened and stretched his back, casting an appreciative glance toward the river. “I'm going to talk to some locals,” he announced. “There may be people here who still hold Cariban folklore. I'd like to see if anyone has stories I haven't yet recorded...and there's also a plant I need to ask about—”

Stan waved him off, already closing his eyes and settling his hands behind his head. “Go on, nerd out to your heart's content. Just yell if yer dying or ya need me to rescue you from some

ancient curse.”

Ford huffed but didn’t argue. “I’ll see you in a bit, Stanley.”

The next thing Stan knew, something warm and aromatic landed on his lap, jolting him awake from his nap. He blinked groggily and cracked open one eye, as Ford stood over him, arms crossed, a smug look playing on his lips.

“Rise and shine,” Ford quipped. “You were snoring loud enough to scare off the wildlife.”

Stan yawned and stretched, adjusting himself to sit upright in the hammock. “Ohh, now *this*,” he said, eyeing the plate with growing interest. “I could get used to this kinda service. What’s on the menu today?”

Ford eased into the hammock beside him, the fabric creaking under their combined weight. “Metemgee,” he said. “It’s a traditional Guyanese dish. Figured you’d appreciate a taste of the local flavor.”

Stan inhaled deeply, his grin widening. “Metem-what-now? Eh, who cares—it smells like heaven. You really know how to spoil a guy.”

Ford snorted. “Don’t push your luck. I’m *not* a maid. You’re just lucky I didn’t let you starve.”

Stan clutched his chest dramatically, letting out an exaggerated sigh. “A real tragedy. I was just about to start drafting my list of demands.” He took a hearty bite, speaking around a mouthful of food. “So, did ya find what you were after out there?”

Ford picked at his own plate thoughtfully. “Actually... *yes*. Some intriguing accounts on Cariban folklore, which fit right in with my research. And one of the local guides helped me with a plant I’d been trying to identify for when we set out again.”

Stan barely followed, too focused on devouring his food, but Ford's next words caught his attention. "They've got some good spots for fishing tomorrow—catfish, piranhas, maybe even peacock bass if we're lucky. Or we could camp near Corona Falls and look for arapaima."

Stan's eyes lit up, nearly missing a beat as he shoveled another spoonful into his mouth. Fishing on the boat had been great, but here? In the depths of South America? That was an entirely different thrill. He was already picturing it: reeling in the biggest damn fish he could find, waving it in Ford's face, just to watch him *stew*.

Ford must've seen the look on his face because he gave him a sharp nudge with his elbow. "Are you even listening?"

Stan blinked, snapping out of his daydream. "Huh? Yeah, yeah. Fishing. *Big fish*. I'm in."

"*So* as I was *saying*, the one thing the locals asked us to keep in mind—they don't want us near the river after dark."

Stan snorted. "What, no skinny-dipping under the stars? Spoilsports."

Ford ignored the comment, his tone turning serious. "They mentioned something similar to the Iara legend. A water siren, capable of taking on a form most desirable to its prey. It's likely a variation influenced by the Amazon River's connection to the Rewa."

Stan snorted, already getting up to head toward the shower in the cabin. "Oh, don't worry, Sixer—I'm not *that* gullible. Ain't no fish-woman gonna lure me off into the water, though I'd be more worried about you—you'd probably start harassing her with questions just so you could scribble down every word in that journal of yours."

Ford bristled at the accusation, scoffing. "I would not. I'm perfectly capable of... restraining myself."

“Yeah, sure. I’ve seen the kinds of freaks you scribbled about in your old journals.”

Ford’s face flushed ever so slightly, but he recovered quickly. “As if *you’re* one to talk. If I remember correctly, the kids once told me a spider-woman managed to charm you before she ____”

Stan paused, pointing an accusatory finger at him. “Hey, she was *charismatic*, alright?” Ford only snorted, the corners of his mouth twitching with barely concealed laughter.

Stan found himself leaning against the worn wooden wall of the shower, letting the hot water sluice over him. The grime of their trek melted away, leaving his skin tingling, cleaner than he’d felt in days. He scrubbed at his arms, watching the suds swirl down the drain, thinking about Ford and his damn folklore.

He wasn’t a stranger to the supernatural—hell, he and Ford had lived it. Oregon had been a playground of weirdness, from gravity-defying anomalies to creatures straight out of nightmares. So it wasn’t that he *didn’t* believe in legends. He’d seen too much to deny the possibility.

But knowing a person’s heart’s desire? Stan snorted, rubbing at a stubborn patch of dirt on his chest. That just sounded like the kind of baloney those unicorns fed Mabel.

Pure of heart, my ass.

Still... Stan couldn’t help but let his mind wander. He tilted his head back under the water, scrubbing at the back of his neck as a whistle escaped him. If this *Iara* thing could supposedly turn into whoever you most desired, who would Ford’s version be? He was certain it wouldn’t be that damned triangle—that much he knew. Ford wasn’t that far gone. But maybe... some quiet, bookish type who’d match his obsession with knowledge? Someone who’d actually *encourage* his endless theorizing and research? Stan shook his head, imagining a soft-spoken, scholarly woman who’d dote on Ford’s every wild idea.

Or maybe someone like his old college roommate, Fiddleford? They used to spend hours locked away in their studies, bouncing ideas off each other like they were in their own little world. Hell, maybe Ford had a thing for people who could keep up with that manic energy.

He frowned slightly. Come to think of it, they never really *talked* about that stuff. Ford never mentioned anyone he was into—not in all those years. Not that it was the kind of thing you’d bring up now, at their age.

He rinsed off, his mind circling around how much time had slipped by. Neither of them had settled down. And Ford... he’d aged *well*. Too well, actually. The sharp angles of his face, the rugged lines around his eyes, that silver streak in his hair—it was infuriating how good he looked. Stan had noticed it more than once, especially on this trip. People *looked* at Ford. Maybe Ford didn’t care, or maybe he was oblivious, but Stan had seen it. Every port they docked at, every village they passed through—there were always lingering glances.

Stan hummed a low tune as he stepped out, toweling himself dry. He pulled on a loose tank top and boxers—way more than he felt like wearing in this heat, but it’d have to do. Running a hand through his damp hair, he tied up his mullet, feeling the sweat already trying to reclaim him. Stepping out, he found Ford on the floor, notes and maps spread around him like they were back in their childhood bedroom. He flicked Ford lightly on the head as he passed.

“Shower’s decent. Even got hot water. Maybe drag your face out of that notebook long enough to enjoy it.”

Ford didn’t look up, just hummed in acknowledgment. “I’ll get to it. Good night, Stanley.”

Stan stretched, yawning. “Yeah, yeah. Don’t stay up all night.” He paused, “You know, this is just like when we were kids. Studying for God-knows-what.”

Ford’s lips twitched into a faint smile.

The morning came with fresh coffee and a lazy call from the kids, Stan grinning through most of it. Stan made sure to give them an exaggerated account of his bug battles, earning Mabel's laugh and Dipper's eye-roll through the screen. Ford, predictably, would chirp responses when he wasn't reading the free wildlife books. Stan might've pocketed one he knew Ford was particularly fond of, but hey—he wasn't gonna admit it.

Their boat was loaded with supplies, and the staff hesitated to let them go unassisted. Ford, of course, had confidently reassured them, insisting they'd manage. Stan had barely stifled his laugh when he overheard one of them mutter, "Gringos have a death wish."

A harpy eagle screeched overhead as they moved upstream, the dense jungle surrounding them. Stan grimaced, casting his line with a flick of his wrist. "Remind me again why we're *fly* fishing? We could've just used the spinning gear we brought."

Ford barely looked up from his own rod. "Conservation," he replied. "We agreed with the staff *not* to spin fish, remember?"

"Right, we're *really* conserving the fish," Stan muttered, glaring at his untouched bait. "They're *so conserved*, they won't even bite."

The words were barely out of his mouth before Ford's line went taut. He reeled in fast, the rod bending under the weight. "Good things come to those who wait," Ford said smugly, casting Stan a grin as he fought the fish.

"Yeah, yeah, *kiss my ass*," Stan grumbled, but he jumped in to help, their combined strength pulling in a hefty peacock bass. Stan scoffed when Ford pulled out his phone.

"First catch of the day. Take a photo for *the kids* ." Ford said innocently, but his smile was smug.

The afternoon picked up from there. Stan started hauling in his own catches, though he found himself distracted, watching Ford. His casting technique was precise, smooth. And dammit, he looked *good* doing it. The t-shirt had been a victory—a hard-fought one after Stan had

threatened to torch Ford's entire turtleneck collection—but the way it hugged his arms, scars and tattoos peeking out? Yeah, it was a damn sight better than those suffocating sweaters.

He was so lost in thought he didn't notice Ford watching him until he heard, "What're you staring at?"

Stan coughed, waving it off. "You should put on SPF. You're gonna burn, and I'm not rubbing aloe on you later."

Ford chuckled. "Not very brotherly of you."

Stan mockingly imitated him, dropping his voice an octave. "*I'm not a maid, Stanford.*"

Ford laughed, genuine and easy. He leaned over the map, pinned down by their bags. "When we hit that river bend, steer close to the banks. We'll be near those plants I mentioned."

Stan, still flushed, gave a mock salute. "Aye aye, Captain Nerd."

Stan hopped out of the boat, boots crunching into the damp soil as he stretched, arms wide, groaning at the stiffness in his back. Ford was already talking, his voice brimming with that same scholarly enthusiasm Stan could never quite tune out—no matter how much he pretended to.

"Stanley, this spot is incredible," Ford said, sweeping his hand toward the water. "The Rupununi River, one of the main tributaries of the Essequibo. And this oxbow lake? A true confluence!" He turned, eyes gleaming. "And look—*Victoria amazonica*. Isn't it *remarkable*?"

Stan blinked at him, then at the massive, green pads floating lazily on the water, their edges curling up slightly as they swayed. "Uh yea. Cool....Probably," he said, pulling out his phone. He turned toward a nearby commotion—a giant anteater lapping water from the riverbank. He snapped a photo, grinning. Mabel would *flip* when she saw this one.

Ford crouched near the water's edge, inspecting some of the reeds. "The plant I'm looking for thrives in wetlands like this," he murmured, mostly to himself. "But it's early in the season... it'll be tricky to identify." He straightened, glancing at Stan. "I might be a while."

Stan shrugged, already setting up his rod. "Knock yourself out. I'll fish. Just leave the extra walkie with me, and we're good."

Ford hesitated, clearly torn between enthusiasm and his innate worry. "You do remember where the flare gun is, right?"

"Yes, *Ma* ." Stan gave him a dry look. "I've got it. I'll be fine. Just don't take too long, or I'm eating both our sandwiches and drinking your beer."

Ford's serious expression cracked into a smile. "Deal." He darted off into the dense foliage, disappearing behind the tall reeds and underbrush.

Time blurred for Stan as he cast his line, steadily adding to his mental tally. A) He'd caught more than Ford, and B) He'd reeled in a damn *arapaima*. The thing was monstrous, sleek, and powerful, and he'd taken a whole series of pictures, including a triumphant selfie.

And there was absolutely no way Ford *wasn't* gonna hear about it.

He stretched, muscles aching pleasantly from the effort, and turned his gaze across the river. Ford was just a little blob now, wandering the far side of the bank. *Good, he's almost done*, Stan thought. He packed up his gear, deciding to sit in the boat and dig into his sandwich. The sun was dipping lower, casting long shadows over the water. They'd need to head back soon—good thing he packed the headlamps, even if they'd probably attract weird jungle critters on the way.

He bit into his sandwich and immediately made a face, pulling out the offending tomato slices. *Seriously, Sixer, stop sneaking in vegetables. Tomatoes suck*. He tossed them into the

water and leaned back, eyes drifting over the lilies Ford had been so jazzed about. They were huge, their wide leaves swaying gently with the current.

Ford was closer now, standing near the edge of the water, his head tilted as if watching something. Stan squinted. *Maybe a river otter?* Those vicious things had been in those guidebooks—dangerous little bastards. He shrugged and cracked open a beer, the fizz hissing in the quiet air.

Then a splash.

Stan's head whipped up.

Ford was gone.

Gone.

“Shit!” He dropped his sandwich and beer, grabbing their folding knife and stun gun. Sprinting toward the bank, he cursed under his breath. *Of course. Of course, Sixer's the one who falls into the damn river. And he's worried about me?*

“I swear to God, IQ, you're gonna regret making me do manual labor,” Stan muttered furiously, crashing through the brush. “Meanwhile, *you're* the one floundering like an idiot ___”

As he got closer, Stan's breath caught. Ford wasn't just fighting; he was fighting....himself?

Another Ford, or something that looked like him—except its skin was darker, glistening with water, and there was scaling along its neck—the *Iara*.

Stan gritted his teeth, aiming the stun gun, but hesitated when his Ford kicked the creature hard, sending it sprawling. The real Ford scrambled toward him, panting.

“You good?” Stan asked, eyes darting between Ford and the creature.

Ford stared at him, wide-eyed, his chest heaving. He looked back at the Iara, then at Stan. “Stanley...” he whispered, his voice tight with disbelief.

“The one and only.” Stan extended his hand, pulling Ford up. His brother dusted himself off, revealing his torn shirt and a mat of chest hair. Stan smirked. “Looks like you were the one who needed the flare gun.”

Ford bristled, trying to regain his composure. “It appears so.”

They pushed the boat back into the water. Stan glanced at the limp form on the bank. “That the siren?”

Ford nodded slowly. “Had to be. I wasn’t sure at first, but then... it grabbed me.” He hesitated. “It was... unsettling. The illusion.”

Stan laughed. “Can’t believe the form you desire most is *you*. Bit narcissistic, don’t ya think?”

Ford hesitated, then asked, “Did you... *see* it?”

“Yeah. Was about to take aim. Lucky for you, it was easy to tell the difference. The scales gave it away. And it didn’t have your dumb star tattoo.”

Ford went silent, staring at the water for a long moment. “*Oh*,” he murmured.

Stan didn’t catch the real weight behind that word. He bent over the GPS, punching in their coordinates. “Ready to head back?”

Ford didn't answer immediately. When Stan glanced over, he noticed Ford's face was flushed, his expression distant. He coughed, adjusting his glasses. "Yes. Let's go."

Weird, Stan thought, watching him climb into the boat. *Probably just a bruised ego.*

Falling in mud while fighting your reflection would do that.

Probably.

The boat ride back was surprisingly smooth, the water calm under the fading sun. Stan lounged with one hand on the rudder, the other gripping a beer, rambling on about the sheer size of the arapaima he'd caught. He'd been trying not to look too proud, but Ford's praise was unexpected—and it hit harder than Stan would've liked to admit.

"That arapaima was impressive, Stan," Ford had said, eyes bright with genuine admiration. "They're not easy to reel in, especially in these waters."

"Damn straight," Stan had replied, puffing up his chest. Praise from Ford was a precious commodity, and it hit different, made him stand a little taller. "Probably set some kind of record. Should've seen it floppin' around like a pissed-off dragon."

Ford chuckled, shaking his head. Then, of course, he veered off into plant territory, going on about the seed capsules and leaves he'd managed to gather. Something about the seasonal timing being off, which was apparently a win for him since the plants were already blooming. Stan had nodded along, half-listening, throwing in an occasional grunt of interest. It was a good rhythm. They talked. They laughed. For a while, it was just... easy.

But something shifted the moment they reached their lodging.

The thing was—it *had* to be more than just a bruised ego. Stan *knew* Ford. He'd seen him fight literal demons and face apocalyptic horrors without so much as a tremble in his voice. But since that encounter with the Iara, something was... off. It wasn't like Ford to get flustered over a little ribbing, but whatever that creature did had shaken him in a way Stan couldn't quite put his finger on.

Ford had practically sprinted for the shower the second they docked, his boots sloshing mud onto the wooden floor. Stan leaned against the doorway, arms crossed, smirking. "Don't jerk off too hard thinkin' about yourself, Sixer. You might break a hip."

Low-hanging fruit, *sure*, but a guaranteed reaction. Normally, Ford would've fired back with something sharp about Stan being immature, or at least rolled his eyes.

Instead, Ford froze mid-step, his face twitching with something that wasn't quite embarrassment but wasn't anger either. He stammered, eyes flicking everywhere but at Stan. Then, without a word, he disappeared into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him.

Stan stood there, scratching his head. "Huh," he muttered to himself. "That's new." Ford was always sharp with his comebacks, quick on his feet. Brushing it off, Stan chalked it up to exhaustion from the long day.

He'd bring it up later, maybe. Or not.

The next morning, Stan woke to find Ford missing. He stretched, yawned, and stepped out onto the porch, the jungle air thick but bearable. His eyes scanned the area until he spotted Ford near the outdoor Arapaima bar, talking with some locals. Stan relaxed a bit. Ford did that sometimes—went off on his research tangents first thing in the morning—but something felt... off.

Ford looked like he was about to puke. His posture was stiff, his hand clutching a notebook tightly to his chest. Stan frowned, quickening his pace as he approached. One of the locals gave him a weird look—like Stan was the last person they expected to see.

What the hell? Stan thought. *Do I look bad or something?*

He brushed it off as they seemed to go about their own business now, leaving Stan alone with Ford. “Hey, Sixer, what’s the plan today?”

Ford jumped like Stan had burned him, spinning around too fast. His face was flushed, and there was an unmistakable panic in his eyes.

“Whoa, the hell’s up with you?” Stan said, holding his hands up. “Ya look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Ford’s mouth worked soundlessly for a moment before he forced out a response. “It’s fine. I was just getting... more accounts for my research.”

Stan hummed, unconvinced. “Sureee. *Research*. Didn’t know research made ya look like you’re gonna shit yourself.”

Ford dragged a hand over his face, groaning. “Do you have to be so *disgustingly* visual?”

“Part of my charm,” Stan quipped, reaching across the table for a ripe fig. As he bit into it, sweet juice dripping down his fingers, he noticed Ford’s face was red again. Stan frowned.

“I *knew* it,” Stan said, pointing the half-eaten fig at him. “I told you to use SPF. You always burn faster than me. Next time, *listen* .”

Ford touched his cheek, his fingers brushing over his skin as if realizing it for the first time. “My face is hot?” he muttered, almost to himself.

He’s being weird.

Stan rolled his eyes, chewing the rest of his fig. “Yeah, genius. At least we got aloe in one of the bags. Seriously though, what’s the plan? You good to go, or do you need a nap?”

Ford blinked out of whatever trance he was in and quickly composed himself. “We could head to Rewa Village. Or, if you prefer, we could do one of the wildlife tours.”

“Either’s fine by me. Your call.” Stan swallowed, watching how Ford’s gaze flicked to him—lingering, intense—and then how his tongue darted out, licking his lips. Stan barely registered it as anything odd.

Probably just Ford thinking too hard again.

“ *Well ?*” Stan prompted, waiting.

Ford seemed to jolt out of his trance. “Right! The village. The wildlife won’t go anywhere.”

Stan nodded. “Sounds good. We can grab some stuff for the kids, maybe eat some fresh food.”

“Perfect,” Ford said quickly, clasping his hands together. “I’ll go grab what we need.” Without waiting, he darted back to the cabin.

“*Real weird,*” Stan muttered, tossing the fig’s stem aside. He wiped his hands on his shorts and shook his head.

The village hummed with quiet life, its people weaving a rhythm between nature and necessity. Stan appreciated the quiet simplicity of it all, even if Ford’s lingering awkwardness was harder to tune out.

They'd stuffed themselves on cassava bread and smoked fish, sat through a birdwatching tour that Ford wouldn't stop raving about, and lent a hand to the locals wherever they could. Despite all of it, the tension clung to Ford like a mosquito cloud. His usual confidence felt fractured, and Stan couldn't shake the feeling that it was somehow his fault.

It didn't help that Ford had buried himself in his notebook again, scribbling something about "phonology" as they sat near the village's main clearing. Stan left him to it, wandering a few paces away to sit on a bench and let the sun warm his face. He closed his eyes, the chatter of some nearby visitors blending into the ambiance of the jungle.

Voices cut through the ambient noise—a group of young visitors. Study-abroad types, by the sound of it, their chatter light and tinged with the arrogance of budding scholars. Stan kept his eyes closed, letting the conversation filter into his awareness as he relaxed.

"Okay, but I'm just saying," a girl's voice—sharp, teasing—rose above the others, "there's no way Dr. Lammens is going to buy that *Hazel* saw 'Josh Hutcherson' in the river."

"Oh, come on, Lilah," came another voice, exasperated but defensive. "It's not fair to dismiss it just because it sounds weird. It's still an oral account, technically!"

"Yeah, but it's *your* oral account. You *know* the Iara screws with perception. How's that going to fly in your paper?" Lilah shot back, laughter edging her words. "What, you're gonna argue that your brain said, 'Yes, this sexy water predator is definitely a *Hunger Games* star?'"

"Why not?" Hazel, Stan's guessing, replied indignantly. "It's what I *saw*. That counts as oral testimony, doesn't it?"

"Oral accounts are supposed to be credible," Lilah shot back. "And let's be real: the Iara's supposed to show anyone who even glances at it what they *want*, right? So how does that even work academically? Everyone sees something different."

Stan cracked one eye open. *What the hell were they talking about?*

A third voice, this one male and muffled as if its owner had a mouthful of food, chimed in. “I still say Lilah’s just mad *she* didn’t see Josh Hutcherson.”

“Excuse me,” Lilah shot back, “I saw Chubby Z from Sev’ral Timez, and that’s *definitely* not what I want most.”

“Sure, it’s not,” Hazel said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “It’s not like you have posters all over *our* dorm—”

Stan blinked fully awake at that, straightening in his seat. “What do you mean by that?” he asked, his gravelly voice cutting through their debate.

The trio jumped like startled birds, the guy with the phone immediately swiveling his camera toward Stan. “Who’s the old guy?” he asked, his grin cheeky.

Stan snorted. “Just an old nosy listener,” he drawled. “You can put ‘inquisitive bastard’ in your captions too, kid. Now, tell me more about this... Iara thing.”

Lilah glanced at her friends before shrugging. “The people here have definitely talked a lot about the folklore of Amazonia on these tours. The point is, the Iara shows everyone something *different*. Even if you’re not its ‘prey,’ it still manifests as whatever you’d find most desirable. That’s why it doesn’t work for Hazel’s paper—it’s subjective.”

Stan’s stomach twisted into a knot. “Wait, hold up,” he said, his voice tight. “You’re saying that... *anyone* who looks at it sees something they... want?”

“From what I’ve gathered in interviews, it’s *always* personal. Romantic, lustful, stuff like that.” Hazel said, thoughtful now.

Stan’s head spun. The words hit like a brick to the skull.

Romantic.

Lustful.

Oh, *hell* no.

Stan swallowed hard. “But, like... could it be... platonic?” His voice came out uneven, and he cleared his throat, trying again. “Could someone see, like, a friend? A sibling? Something, uh, wholesome?”

Lilah gave him a skeptical look. “Doesn’t sound like it. From what I’ve read, it plays on your deepest desires. So, no offense, but that’d be a *weird* siren.”

Stan’s brain spun like a top. The Iara’s form was tailored to its viewer’s desires. And Ford... hadn’t seen himself. That meant... Stan had seen—

Oh, Sweet Moses.

The guy with the phone—Max, maybe?—broke the silence. “Hey, are you, like, a local celebrity or something?” He squinted at his phone. “People keep commenting on my story, saying something about your sea travels and, to uh, say hi to the ‘silver fox?’”

Stan pinched the bridge of his nose, exhaling slowly. “They’re probably talkin’ about my brother,” he muttered, jerking his thumb toward the distant figure of Ford.

The trio squinted in unison, sizing Ford up from afar. “Oh yeah,” Lilah said finally, her tone oddly impressed. “*Definitely* silver fox-worthy.”

Stan stared at them, then back at Ford, whose shirt clung to his back in the humid air. He looked...disturbingly good in the sunlight, his features sharp and the lines of his face carved

with age in a way that wasn't unkind. A vein throbbed in Stan's temple. There had to be some logical explanation.

Maybe that damn siren was broken.

When their gazes accidentally locked, something clicked. Forbidden. Damned. Twisted. Heat flooded Stan's face, and he abruptly looked away, pretending to focus on the water.

Ford must have noticed his unease because moments later, he was at Stan's side, his expression cautious. "How was your—?"

Stan didn't let him finish. "Riveting," he said flatly, the sarcasm biting enough to make Ford frown.

Ford hesitated, then pushed on, stumbling slightly over his words. "We should... talk. When we get back."

Stan sighed, running a hand down his face. "Yeah, Sixer," he muttered, his voice resigned. "We should."

Stan couldn't keep his hands from fidgeting, fingers picking at a loose thread on the hem of his shorts as the oppressive weight of silence bore down on him. Back in the privacy of their small lodging, the air between him and Ford was thick—too thick. They sat on opposite beds, a wooden nightstand and a million unspoken things separating them.

God, if only he could have this conversation drunk. Or better yet, forget about all of it drunk. A bottle of something strong and stupid would've been perfect right about now. Hell, blackout oblivion would be a blessing right now.

Instead, he was stone-cold sober, staring at the man who was both his brother and—if that damn Iara was to be believed—something else entirely.

Stan cleared his throat, shifting uncomfortably. His gaze flitted around the room, landing everywhere except on Ford. The thatched roof, the mosquito net, the slightly warped floorboards—everything suddenly fascinated him. He glanced at Ford just as his brother opened his mouth to speak.

“Okay,” Stan started, his voice gruff. “Before you call this whole world tour off—before you decide to ditch me and sail off into the sunset solo—just... hold on a sec, alright?”

Ford opened his mouth, but Stan barreled on, the words spilling out in a nervous, uneven stream.

“I get it if you don’t want to even be near me after this. I mean, Jesus, I get it. But if you’re gonna bail, at least wait ‘til we’re back in the States. Leave me in Florida or something. I’ll rent a car, disappear into the Keys, maybe pick up a fake name. But don’t leave me stranded here, ‘cause *technically* we’re on a no-fly list.”

Ford frowned, his brow furrowing in confusion. “What do you mean *No-fly list* —”

“But you can’t leave me here in Guyana, man. I mean, the bugs alone—” He swatted at the air like they were swarming already. “—I’ll die.”

Ford blinked, trying to get a word in, but Stan bulldozed over him, too far gone to stop. “It’s gotta be cabin fever. That siren or whatever—it’s projectin’ weird shit, okay? That folklore stuff is all junk anyway. I mean, I used to think Lazy Susan was hot, remember?” He laughed nervously, the sound forced and hollow. “And, uh, definitely *not* my own brother. So clearly, the Iara didn’t do its homework. That makes sense, right? Totally logical.”

“Stanley,” Ford blurted, his voice louder than usual. “ *Stop.* ”

Stan froze mid-ramble, his heart hammering like he'd been caught stealing cookies from a jar. Ford exhaled through his nose, looking for all the world like a man trying to steady himself before walking a tightrope.

"I saw you," Ford said.

Stan blinked, confused. "Yeah, you saw me runnin' to pull ya out of the river. That's the *whole* reason we're having this conversation."

"No," Ford said, his voice tighter. "You know what I mean."

Silence. Long, *suffocating* silence.

"*Oh*," Stan finally managed, the word slipping out like a deflated balloon. He stared at Ford, waiting for the punchline, for some clarification that would undo the weight of what was just said. But Ford's face remained solemn, resolute.

Ford huffed, the sound tinged with frustration. "I tried to reason through it. I thought maybe it was some kind of... familial longing, considering how much time we spent apart. But the more I analyzed it, the more I observed you—" His voice faltered for a moment, and Stan's mind flashed unbidden to Ford's lingering gaze earlier, the way he'd been looking at him as he ate that damn *fig*.

"And?" Stan prompted, his voice brittle.

Ford's jaw worked for a moment before he admitted, "The Iara have not manifested familial longing. Every account I've documented indicates it's... romantic. Or lustful."

Stan exhaled sharply through his nose, leaning back on the bed and rubbing a hand over his face. "That's what those kids were saying earlier. Romantic or lustful." He paused, looking at Ford out of the corner of his eye. "By the way, congrats. You're considered 'silver-fox worthy.'"

Ford blinked, confused. “I still don’t know what that means.”

Stan huffed out a laugh, low and tired, staring at his hands. “This is insane. *Both* of us? We both... saw each other? What the hell does that even mean?”

Ford’s expression was grim now, his gaze fixed somewhere on the floor. “It means,” he said quietly, “that I’ve been trying to rationalize something that doesn’t fit into logic. Something I’ve... known, but refused to acknowledge.”

Stan snorted, the sound bitter. “Yeah, well, if you’re planning to abandon ship, take the boat. I’ll figure something out.”

Ford’s head snapped up, his eyes wide. “Stanley. You love the boat,” he said. “I could... I could leave it to you.”

“You and I both know it’s *never* been about the boat,” Stan said flatly.

“I just thought—”

“Hell, I’d rather drown with it if you’re not on it.” Stan cut in, his voice sharp. The weight of his words hung in the air, and he finally pulled his gaze from his hands to meet Ford’s face. Ford’s breath hitched, his lips parting slightly as if to respond, but no words came out.

“This is... maddening,” Ford muttered, running a hand through his hair. “It’s morally unethical. Isn’t it?”

Stan shrugged, his voice dry. “I’ve been accused of worse. Might as well add somethin’ else to the list.”

That drew a laugh from Ford, short and disbelieving, but it softened the edges of the tension between them. Slowly, Ford stood, hesitating for a moment before sitting on the edge of Stan's bed. Stan's instincts screamed at him to leave—to defuse this powder keg before it blew. But he stayed.

"I suppose," Ford said quietly, his hands folded in his lap, "this means that I... *love* you?"

Stan's lips twitched. "In a... not-brotherly way, I'm guessing?"

Ford huffed a laugh, mimicking Stan's voice. "*Yes*. In a not-brotherly way."

Stan rolled his eyes, shaking his head. "*That* doesn't even sound like me. Smoke some Marlboro Reds for a few years, then you'll get it. "

Ford's smile grew, soft and silly, as he tilted his head, watching Stan expectantly. Stan realized with a jolt that he hadn't said it back, hadn't made the word *mutual*. He swallowed hard, his gaze dropping to their hands. Their fingers brushed, and before Stan could stop himself, he closed the distance. Ford's hands were big, warm, and steady—so much steadier than Stan felt. Neither of them realized how close they'd leaned into each other until Stan's hand ghosted against Ford's cheek. The kiss that followed was tentative at first, then deeper, wetter, warmer.

It was soft and messy, the kind of kiss you'd see in some Hallmark movie if the premise was *wildly inappropriate*. Ford's hands came to rest on Stan's shoulders as he gently pushed him back onto the bed. When they pulled apart, both of them were breathing heavily, faces flushed.

"We should've been doing this from the get-go," Stan muttered, a wry grin tugging at his lips.

Ford laughed into Stan's shoulder, the sound muffled and warm. "You cannot be serious."

Stan raised an eyebrow. "What? I can't be the only one thinkin' it."

Ford hummed, pressing soft, deliberate kisses along Stan's neck. "You're *insufferable*," he muttered, but the warmth in his voice betrayed his words. "But I think we're making up for lost time quite nicely."

Stan just laughed, his hand threading through Ford's hair.

Stan had spent the entire trip back to Georgetown nursing two competing thoughts: one, that Ford was the most exasperating man alive, and two, that he wanted to kiss him again until they were both too breathless to argue. The development from two nights ago had been.... a lot to take in, but the way Ford had shut things down?

A real mood killer.

Firstly, who the hell used the word lubricant with such clinical precision like he was preparing a damn science experiment?

And "disgracing the lodging"? Oh, *please*. Stan was willing to bet the Amazon had seen more action than a seedy motel on prom night. Hell, if anything, Ford should've been *thanking him* for finding a way to make this world tour a little less academic. Granted though, the lube was...needed. For men of their age.

Then there'd been the revelation about the no-fly list. That one hit like a slap. Ford had yanked himself away mid-makeout in realization, demanding an explanation with that furrowed brow and those judgmental eyes. Stan had thrown his hands up in exasperation, muttering something about amnesia.

"How was I supposed to know we could've just flown in?" Stan had snapped. "You didn't mention it either!"

“I assumed,” Ford had replied icily, “that you would tell me something as *important as being banned from commercial airlines* before we embarked on a *global sailing expedition*.”

“Yeah, well, excuse me for not being able to recall every crime I’ve committed across state and federal lines!”

“I could’ve handled it!” Ford shot back, pacing the small room with his hands running through his hair. “I *would’ve* handled it, if you’d told me!”

“Yeah, sure, Mister Mind-Control Tie. Real *ethical* solution there.”

Ford hadn’t found it funny, and Stan hadn’t particularly cared. But even with the interruptions, the night hadn’t been a total loss. They’d pushed their twin beds together, and though Ford muttered complaints about the uneven frame and ‘accidentally’ kicked Stan twice in his sleep, the closeness had been oddly comforting.

Stan had woken up with Ford’s hair tickling his nose and a sense of peace he couldn’t quite put into words.

Back in Georgetown, the return to their catamaran felt like slipping on a pair of well-worn shoes. It wasn’t just a shared vessel anymore—it was *theirs*. They restocked their supplies, emptied Stan’s separate room (not like they needed it now, anyhow), bought fresh fruit from the market, and prepared for their next leg of the journey. Stan swiped a tiny water lily magnet for the fridge—because, hey, souvenirs—and was pretty proud of himself for sprucing up their shared living space.

Ford had launched into organizing their cabinets, moving things into some incomprehensible system. Stan didn’t even try to follow; he’d just make fun of Ford later, especially about the figs.

The cheeky bastard had actually *bought* figs.

When he finally settled down for a video call with the kids, Ford was still fussing with their supplies. Stan propped the phone against a jar of coffee beans and grinned at the screen, making their trip sound a hundred times more adventurous than it actually was.

“So you’re telling me,” Mabel said, wide-eyed, “that you caught a fish this big?”

Stan stretched his arms wide, grinning. “Damn right I did. Thing was practically a river dragon.”

Dipper sighed, shaking his head. “And what was Great Uncle Ford doing while you wrestled with this ‘river dragon’?”

Ford’s voice cut in from behind him. “I was collecting data on the seasonal blooms of a species I had seen in Dimension Aeales-48 that grow here in the tropics. But yes, Stan did manage to catch an impressive specimen.”

Stan turned to find Ford leaning against the doorway, his lips twitching with amusement. “See?” Stan said to the kids. “Even Sixer admits it.”

The kids laughed, and the conversation turned to their plans for the week. When Ford finally joined him, he plopped down beside Stan, leaning his head on his shoulder. His fingers brushed over Stan’s knee, tracing lazy patterns that sent Stan’s heart rate into overdrive. It was an innocent enough gesture, but God, it felt anything but.

Ford was so... close. His hair smelled faintly of saltwater and something vaguely herbal. Stan had half a mind to tell him off for being so distracting, especially while they were on a call, but Ford’s weight against him felt too good to complain about.

Mabel’s voice dragged him back to reality. “We’re heading out for lunch—time zones are weird. Talk to you later, Grunkles!”

“Later, kids,” Stan said, forcing his voice to stay steady. The screen blinked off, leaving the room suddenly quiet. Stan let out a long exhale and poked Ford’s side. “You’re a tease, you know that?”

Ford turned to him, feigning innocence. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Stan huffed, crossing his arms. “Sure you don’t.”

“You don’t have to be so dramatic,” Ford said smoothly, sitting up straighter. He adjusted his glasses, but his expression turned thoughtful, almost mischievous. “I thought you might want to continue where we left off.”

Stan’s heart stuttered in his chest. He stared at Ford, the casual way he said it, like he wasn’t throwing Stan’s whole world off its axis. “What makes you think that?”

Ford’s smile widened, eyes gleaming with mischief. “Call it a hypothesis.”

“Oh yeah? Finally ready to loosen up?”

“I’m saying the circumstances are now more... accommodating.”

Stan leaned in. “Well, Sixer, I’ve always been a sucker for *good accommodations*.”

Ford rolled his eyes, but his smile didn’t waver. “Careful, Stanley. You might actually make me laugh.”

“I’ll consider it my greatest achievement.”

Stan hadn't really thought through what "picking up where they left off" would look like in a damn catamaran cabin. For one thing, the space was cramped—just enough room to move without cracking your head on something, but not enough to get fancy. For another, Stan hadn't exactly prepared himself for Ford's... *enthusiasm*.

Ford was kissing him like he'd just discovered it, his lips persistent and firm, his hands wandering with almost scholarly precision, like he was cataloging Stan's entire body through touch. Which was fine—hell fucking *great*, even—except Stan couldn't keep his brain from spiraling into every insecurity he'd ever had.

"Moses, Ford," Stan muttered against his mouth, pulling back just enough to take a breath. "You kiss like you're trying to win an award."

Ford tilted his head, giving Stan that familiar, analytical look that used to make him feel like he was under a microscope. "And *you* kiss like you're trying to deflect with humor," he countered, and Stan huffed in annoyance.

"Yeah, well, one of us has to," Stan grumbled, his face heating as Ford's hands trailed down his sides.

Ford just snorted, his fingers catching on the hem of Stan's shirt. "Take this off."

"Why?" Stan asked, half-laughing but not moving. "You already know what's under there, Sixer. Unappealing y'know?."

"Don't start that," Ford said sharply, his voice soft but firm as his fingers slipped under the fabric. He didn't yank—he just waited, looking up at Stan like he was daring him to argue. "Off."

Stan rolled his eyes but obliged, peeling the shirt off over his head and tossing it aside. He crossed his arms over his chest, suddenly feeling vulnerable in a way that had nothing to do with being shirtless.

Ford's gaze swept over him, slow and deliberate, and Stan felt his stomach twist. "I get it, alright?" Stan said with a laugh, the sound rough and self-conscious. "I'm not exactly cover-model material these days. If this is some kind of pity thing—"

Ford didn't respond—not verbally, at least. Instead, he leaned in, his lips grazing over Stan's collarbone, his hands continuing their unhurried exploration. He pressed a kiss there, then another, his touch as stubborn as his expression had been.

Stan's laugh died in his throat, replaced by a low grunt as Ford's hands slid up to his shoulders, kneading into the tense muscles there with surprising strength. "You've got hands like a damn vice grip," Stan muttered, his voice raspier now. "What'd you do, practice on cinder blocks?"

Ford hummed in response, a maddeningly smug sound, and Stan couldn't help but grin despite himself.

"Arrogant little—" Stan started, but the words broke off into a hiss as Ford found a particularly tight spot, his thumbs digging in with just enough pressure to make it hurt in the best way. "Goddammit, that's not fair."

Ford pulled back just enough to look at him, one eyebrow raised. "Not fair?" he repeated, his hands not stopping their relentless work. "You're the one who decided to turn this into a comedy routine."

"Yeah, well, comedy's my thing," Stan shot back, though his voice lacked its usual bite. He was too busy not melting under Ford's touch, his head tilting back slightly as his brother worked his way down his chest.

"You've got *other* things," Ford said quietly, almost to himself, and Stan's breath caught when Ford's lips found the center of his chest, lingering there as if to make a point.

Stan swallowed hard, his hand coming up to rest against Ford's head. He didn't push—just let his fingers tangle in Ford's hair, the sensation grounding him in a way he hadn't expected. "You're a piece of work, you know that?"

Ford pulled back slightly, his lips quirking into a faint smile. “So you’ve told me. *Repeatedly*. How would you like to do this?”

Stan huffed. “Gee, I dunno, IQ. You’re the genius here. Maybe you’ve got some kinda thesis paper on this? A sex guide?”

“It’s almost like you *don’t* want this to happen.”

“Sixer, you’re kneeling on top of me in a goddamn boat cabin. What do *you* think?”

Ford quirked an eyebrow, his lips twitching with amusement, but he didn’t say anything else. Instead, he shifted, pulling back just enough to settle between Stan’s legs. His hands rested on Stan’s knees, and he gave them a gentle nudge. “Trust me,” he murmured, though there was a glimmer of that old stubborn arrogance in his tone.

Stan did trust him. Maybe *too much*, considering he let his thighs fall open, stretching muscles that hadn’t seen this kind of action in years. He groaned, half from the stretch and half from his own nerves.

Ford reached for the small tube on the nightstand, unscrewing the cap with a clinical efficiency that made Stan groan internally. Lubricant. God, could the guy not just call it lube like a normal person? Or better yet, not call it anything at all?

“*Don’t* say it,” Stan warned, narrowing his eyes.

“I wasn’t going to,” Ford said. “But I’ll admit, I enjoy how much it bothers you.”

“Christ, it’s cause ya say it like you’re working on a science experiment.”

Ford's lips twitched into a cheeky smile as he warmed the slick between his hands. "What would you prefer? 'Magic jelly?'"

"Literally *anything* but lubricant," Stan groaned, dragging a hand over his face.

Ford chuckled softly, his fingers trailing lower. "Well, technically, it's a—"

"You're a real bastard, you know that?" Stan muttered, but the heat in his cheeks betrayed him.

Ford didn't answer, just leaned in to press a kiss to the inside of Stan's knee before slicking his fingers. The sensation that followed was both familiar and foreign—a slow, deliberate pressure that had Stan biting his lip to keep from making any undignified sounds.

"Relax," Ford murmured, his voice maddeningly calm. His fingers worked Stan open with a patience that bordered on infuriating. "You're doing fine."

"Yeah, sure, easy for you to say," Stan bit out, his voice strained. "You're not the one—"

He gasped, his hips jerking involuntarily as Ford found just the right angle. His head fell back, a string of curses tumbling from his lips before he could stop them.

"Sorry, what was that?" Ford asked, his tone light and teasing as he added another finger, his movements methodical. "Didn't quite catch it."

"Fuck you," Stan ground out, though his voice lacked any real bite. His legs twitched as Ford curled his fingers, and he bit down on his lip to muffle the sound that escaped him.

"Eventually," Ford quipped.

The stretch burned in a way that was both unfamiliar and very good, and Stan found himself shifting his hips, chasing the sensation despite himself. He felt ridiculous, but Ford's hands were steady, his movements careful, and Stan couldn't bring himself to care about much else at that moment.

Then Ford pulled his fingers away, and Stan let out a disgruntled sound that he'd never admit was a whine. "Flip over."

Stan groaned, throwing an arm over his face. He was trying to *torture* him.

Pure, agonizing, torture.

"You'll survive, Come now. Heh. *Come.* " Ford said dryly, his hands helping guide Stan into position.

Stan *wants* to deck him. "Oh, you think you're funny, huh?"

"Extremely," Ford said, still grinning.

Eventually, he found himself on his stomach, his face buried in the pillow as he adjusted to the new angle. The bed creaked beneath them, and then Ford's hands were on his hips, steady and grounding.

The next sensation wasn't fingers—it was thicker, hotter, and holy hell, that was *Ford's cock*. Stan tensed instinctively, a sharp breath escaping him as Ford pushed in, slow and careful.

"Breathe," Ford murmured, his voice softer now. "You're okay."

The burn faded quickly, replaced by a stretch that sent sparks skittering down his spine. And then Ford started moving, slow and deliberate, and all Stan could do was hold on.

The sounds that escaped him weren't his proudest moments—soft whimpers, muffled moans, and the occasional broken *please* that he couldn't seem to bite back. But every noise seemed to spur Ford on, his breath hot against Stan's ear as he murmured low, breathless encouragement.

“*Stanley*,” Ford whispered, his voice rough but reverent. The way he said it—like it was both a prayer and a curse—made Stan's chest tighten in a way he didn't want to think about.

It wasn't just the physical sensation that had Stan teetering on the edge. It was the way Ford's hands gripped him, firm and possessive, like he was afraid Stan might slip away. It was the way Ford's voice dropped to a near-growl every time he murmured Stan's name, and the way they fit together—perfectly and impossibly, like they'd been made for this.

Stan didn't even register when Ford's hand wrapped around him, stroking with lazy precision. It was *too much*, and he came with a shuddering groan, his body clenching tightly around Ford in a way that dragged Ford over the edge with him.

Ford buried himself deep, his breath hitching as he came, and Stan felt the ghost of a kiss against his shoulder—the one with the branding that never quite faded.

By the time they finally collapsed onto the bed, spent and sticky, Stan was sure his legs didn't work anymore. He turned his head to look at Ford, who was sprawled out beside him, his chest rising and falling as he caught his breath.

“Sooo,” Stan said, his voice dry, “Uh... room service gonna set the shower for me, or what?”

Ford turned his head to stare at him, his expression blank for a moment before a laugh bubbled out of him. “For a second,” Ford said between breaths, “I thought about throwing you overboard.”

Stan grinned, his eyes closing as he let his body sink into the mattress. “Figures. Guess I'll settle for an ‘in a bit,’ then?”

Ford chuckled softly, his arm draping lazily over Stan's chest. "In a bit," he agreed.

End Notes

Fin.

Ehehe now to go to LC jail<3

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